societal concern. Support for this approach did not correlate with any of the farm or background characteristics.

Use-value assessment with no penalty upon sale correlated with support for control measures in general and a stronger sense of overall sensitivity to farmland loss as a long-term issue. Older farmers with lower incomes tended to be stronger supporters of this approach.

Those favoring no program were less likely to endorse farmland loss as an issue, did not support control measures, and did not see the matter as a societal concern. Larger landowners and those with larger gross sales were more likely to oppose the no-program option.

The attitudinal dimensions correlated best with support for the various control measures. Generally, the stronger or more comprehensive the government intervention, the more variance the independent variables explained. This was particularly true for the attitudinal variables. Farm characteristics had little impact on the options. Off-farm workday regression coefficients were essentially zero in all cases.

Greater dependence on farm income correlated well to the concept of farmland protection. Older farmers tended to be more opposed to most strategies, although they favored the use-value assessment option that protects the right to speculate on sales for commercial development.

Conclusions

Agricultural land preservation was a general concern among landowners in the three counties. But an unfocused sense of societal obligation did not seem to underwrite strong commitment to action. Recognizing farmland loss as a potential problem did not extend to support for specific measures to protect farmland from competing uses. The results showed little interest in measures that might constrain the landowner's potential to speculate on the value of his or her property for nonagricultural uses. Respondents endorsed measures that sheltered agricultural land from taxes at higher market values, but support diminished when tax protection was coupled with a financial penalty upon conversion to nonagricultural land use. Respondents also felt farmers should have a primary voice in decisions about farmland use.

A majority of landowners clearly rejected mandatory controls as a means of farmland protection. The majority clearly accepted use-value assessment, which is currently used in Alabama. Other methods drew a large proportion of undecided responses. Educational programs on these approaches could alter the salience of the issue and respondents' stands on specific programs. Further, landowners might support other approaches not considered in the survey.

Landowners recognized the potential for conflict between agriculture and urban growth. Respondents, however, perceived that the benefits of economic growth outweigh the costs of agricultural land loss in most cases. The idea that growth could be channeled or guided to preserve farmland was fairly well received. But if forced to make a direct choice between farm preservation or growth, the respondents seemed to prefer growth. The landowners did feel, however, that it was important to initiate some level of activity or public affairs programming to respond to the farmland preservation issue.

Farmland protection seems to be a generalized concern in the three counties, but is not perceived as an acute problem requiring immediate or near-term response. Until a clear and present loss or harm to the integrity of the agricultural industry in these counties is apparent or a large collective decline in agricultural production is demonstrated, the idea of farmland protection alone probably will not precipitate action to stem land conversion.

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